

Amendments to the Specification:

Please replace the paragraph at page 5, lines 14-22 with the following paragraph:

Alternatively, the focal lens 24 of the laser beam 22 may be focused at an elevated point 27 slightly above the surface of the substrate 26, as shown in FIG. 5. For example, the focal point of the laser may be 0.10 inches to about 1.0 inches above the surface of the workpiece. This configuration results in a defocused hot zone 35 into which a powder 28 is injected via powder injection device 37. The powder 28 is heated sufficiently so that it is in a plastic state when it impacts the substrate 26. Upon impacting the substrate 26, the heated powder 28 is rapidly quenched by the relatively cool substrate 26, which acts as a heat sink. Other laser cladding methods and techniques known to those of skill in the art can also be used. An apparatus capable of performing such laser cladding process is described in U.S. Pat. No. 5,449,536 and is incorporated herein by reference.